

FTC's funeral complaint

Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has withdrawn its acceptance of a consent agreement it signed with Service Corporation International, a funeral home chain headquartered in Houston, TX [CONSUMER NEWS: Sept. 15, 1975] & issued a new complaint alleging that some SCI funeral homes have overcharged customers & have used unfair & deceptive practices.

The new complaint charges that some SCI funeral homes misstated expenses & overcharged customers for various items, such as obituary notices, the funeral homes arranged but did not themselves provide. Further allegations in the complaint are that various SCI funeral homes have: (1) misrepresented the preservation capability of sealer caskets; (2) falsely claimed or suggested that a casket was required for crematory services; (3) performed embalming without first obtaining permission from the family; (4) & have made payments to medical examiners, morgue or hospital employees, of police who have notified SCI funeral homes when certain deaths have occurred.

SCI operates 135 funeral homes in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, Texas, Washington & District of Columbia.

Warning!

Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has warned that certain aluminum baseball bats & one piece rubber grip & knob components may be hazardous to players. According to CPSC, the one piece grips could deteriorate with normal use & separate from the handle of the bat, causing the bat to be propelled during a swinging motion & possibly striking a person in proximity to the batter. Bats were made & distributed by 6 companies: Hillerich & Bradsby Co.; Lannom Manufacturing Co.; Reynolds Metals Co.; Eaton Corp.; Wilson Sporting Goods Inc., a division of PepsiCo, Inc.; & Alcoa Sport Products Co., a subsidiary of Alcoa. They were sold under the following trade names: Adirondack, Easton, H&B/Louisville Slugger, Reynolds, AJD, Worth, Sears, Sunsmacker, Wilson & Rawlings. Under a consent order accepted by CPSC, the companies are offering modification kits for the bats to eliminate the hazards.

What to do: If you purchased one of the above bats, go to any sporting goods store or department in a general retail store to get a preaddressed post card supplied by the 6 manufacturers. On the card, put the manufacturer's name, bat model number, length & color of the bat, dealer's name & address & the date of purchase. When the manufacturer gets the post card the company will send you a free kit that will modify the bat for safety.

consumer news

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE

Office of Consumer Affairs

Virginia H. Knauer, Director

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New consumer laws

President Ford has signed 3 new laws which extend consumer's rights in credit transactions.

On Feb. 27, President Ford signed the State Taxation of Depositories Act (P.L. 94-222), a law which combines several credit-related subjects for the purpose of extending or clarifying them. Important provisions of law for consumers are:

- extension of Negotiable Order of Withdrawals—or NOW—accounts to all the New England states. These accounts allow consumers to draw checks on their interest-bearing saving accounts (CONSUMER REGISTER: Feb. 1, 1974). With the passage of this law, NOW accounts will be available in Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont & Maine as well as Massachusetts & New Hampshire where they have been in operation since 1972.

- an amendment to the Truth-in-lending Act which clarifies how retailers can offer discounts to cash-paying customers. Under the law, merchants can offer cash discounts of up to 5% of the purchase price and still be exempt from state usury laws. The law doesn't prohibit higher cash discounts but specifies that above 5%, the merchant is subject to Federal & state laws governing credit transactions. The law does, however, prohibit the imposition of a surcharge on credit card customers for 3 years.

On March 23, President Ford signed 2 other consumer credit laws. One law (P.L. 94-239) expands the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (CONSUMER NEWS: Oct. 15, 1975) making it illegal for creditors to discriminate against consumers on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age or because all or part of the consumer's income comes from public assistance. The new law also requires creditors to notify consumers of the specific reasons why they were denied credit. These 2 provisions become effective next year.

The other new credit law (P.L. 94-240) is called the Consumer Leasing Act of 1976 & is designed to give consumers more information about the leasing of products. Under the law, leasing companies must give consumers prior to the signing of a lease a written statement describing: the amount of charges not included in periodic lease payments (such as registration or license fees & insurance); the extent of warranty coverage; a description of the insurance that is available; a description of any security interest to be held in connection with the lease; the number, amount & due dates of payments; & a statement of the conditions under which a lease can be terminated early. The law also sets new requirements for the advertising of leases to assure meaningful & accurate disclosure of lease terms in ads. The law goes into effect March 23, 1977.

Recalls

• **SHRIMP—Food & Drug Administration (FDA)** announces recall of several kinds of canned shrimp. Brands being recalled are: Louisiana Brand Broken Shrimp; Louisiana Brand Small Shrimp; Nugget Brand Broken Shrimp; Fish House International, Gourmet Cocktail Shrimp; Blue Gulf Brand Jumbo Shrimp; Nola Brand Broken Shrimp; Carnation Broken Shrimp; Tropical Foods Shrimp; Gulf Treat Brand Small Shrimp; & Shop-Rite Superior Quality Shrimp, small. Manufactured by Trosclair Canning Co., Cameron, LA. Distribution was nationwide. Products are being recalled because they were underprocessed during canning, which may pose a potential for bacterial growth.

• **CARPETS—Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)** has accepted a consent order from Continental Industries Inc. (1) prohibiting the firm, which does business as Modulon Carpets, Sale Creek, TN, from manufacturing or selling carpets that do not meet Federal flammability standards & (2) requiring the company to recall defective items for correction or destruction. According to CPSC's complaint, 197 rolls of "Galveston Bay" style carpeting that were manufactured & sold in the fall of 1972 did not meet Federal flammability standards & are being recalled. Carpet involved has a nylon pile with a foam back & comes in a variety of colors. It was sold by Montgomery Ward for distribution to its Chicago-area retail stores.

What to do: If you think you may have purchased this carpeting, you should contact the store for recall information. If it is flammable, it should be returned to the manufacturer to be reworked or destroyed. If the product has to be destroyed, you will be refunded the full purchase price.

• **PACIFIERS—Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)** has announced the recall of 37,000 pacifiers after learning of the death of a 5-month-old boy in New York. Pacifiers were imported from Spain by La Cibeles Inc., Union City, NJ, which is cooperating in the recall. Product is marketed in 4 series, marked "Fauna," "Flower," "Texas" & "Navy" & sells for about 45 cents each. Handle is in various shapes & shield is marked "Made in Spain." It was distributed in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Maryland, Florida & Puerto Rico. According to CPSC, the product is being recalled because it is smaller than most pacifiers, making it possible for a child to swallow it. The child who died had swallowed the saucer-shaped plastic shield at the base of the pacifier, which caught in his throat.

What to do: If you purchased the pacifier described above, return it to the store for a complete refund.

Translation trouble

CONSUMER NEWS, in its zeal to go as metric as possible, has run into difficulty. How do you say "20 miles per gallon" in metric terms? You could express it in kilometers per liter (k/l), which is the direct conversion—and you come up with 9 kilometers per liter. Another way is to say "12 liters per 100 kilometers." (Four liters is a little more than a gallon, & a kilometer is about .6 of a mile.)

The conversions seem awkward now, but as consumers become accustomed to seeing more metric sized containers in retail stores, expressions such as "9 k/l" should not present too many problems.

Consumers have written to us about our metric equivalents. Most of them say we shouldn't be gradual—the sooner we convert the better. What do you think?

What the weather reporter means

More & more weather reporters on radio & television are giving temperature readings in degrees Fahrenheit & degrees Celsius. It is all part of the U.S. conversion to the metric system. If you hear the degrees Celsius, but not degrees Fahrenheit—or vice versa—, here is a chart to help you figure out how hot or cold it is.

| °F | °C | °F | °C | °F | °C | °F | °C | °F | °C |
|-----|------|----|------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| -49 | -45* | -9 | -23 | 31 | -1 | 71 | 22 | 111 | 44 |
| -48 | -44 | -8 | -22 | 32 | 0* | 72 | 22 | 112 | 44 |
| -47 | -44 | -7 | -22 | 33 | 1 | 73 | 23 | 113 | 45* |
| -46 | -43 | -6 | -21 | 34 | 1 | 74 | 23 | 114 | 46 |
| -45 | -43 | -5 | -21 | 35 | 2 | 75 | 24 | 115 | 46 |
| -44 | -42 | -4 | -20* | 36 | 2 | 76 | 24 | 116 | 47 |
| -43 | -42 | -3 | -19 | 37 | 3 | 77 | 25* | 117 | 47 |
| -42 | -41 | -2 | -19 | 38 | 3 | 78 | 26 | 118 | 48 |
| -41 | -41 | -1 | -18 | 39 | 4 | 79 | 26 | 119 | 49 |
| -40 | -40* | 0 | -18 | 40 | 4 | 80 | 27 | 120 | 49 |
| -39 | -39 | 1 | -17 | 41 | 5* | 81 | 27 | 121 | 49 |
| -38 | -39 | 2 | -17 | 42 | 6 | 82 | 28 | 122 | 50* |
| -37 | -38 | 3 | -16 | 43 | 6 | 83 | 28 | 123 | 51 |
| -36 | -38 | 4 | -16 | 44 | 7 | 84 | 29 | 124 | 51 |
| -35 | -37 | 5 | -15* | 45 | 7 | 85 | 29 | 125 | 52 |
| -34 | -37 | 6 | -14 | 46 | 8 | 86 | 30* | 126 | 52 |
| -33 | -36 | 7 | -14 | 47 | 8 | 87 | 31 | 127 | 53 |
| -32 | -36 | 8 | -13 | 48 | 9 | 88 | 31 | 128 | 53 |
| -31 | -35* | 9 | -13 | 49 | 9 | 89 | 32 | 129 | 54 |
| -30 | -34 | 10 | -12 | 50 | 10* | 90 | 32 | 130 | 54 |
| -29 | -34 | 11 | -12 | 51 | 11 | 91 | 33 | 131 | 55* |
| -28 | -33 | 12 | -11 | 52 | 11 | 92 | 33 | 132 | 56 |
| -27 | -33 | 13 | -11 | 53 | 12 | 93 | 34 | 133 | 56 |
| -26 | -32 | 14 | -10* | 54 | 12 | 94 | 34 | 134 | 57 |
| -25 | -32 | 15 | -9 | 55 | 13 | 95 | 35* | 135 | 57 |
| -24 | -31 | 16 | -9 | 56 | 13 | 96 | 36 | 136 | 58 |
| -23 | -31 | 17 | -8 | 57 | 14 | 97 | 36 | 137 | 58 |
| -22 | -30* | 18 | -8 | 58 | 14 | 98 | 37 | 138 | 59 |
| -21 | -29 | 19 | -7 | 59 | 15* | 99 | 37 | 139 | 59 |
| -20 | -29 | 20 | -7 | 60 | 16 | 100 | 38 | 140 | 60* |
| -19 | -28 | 21 | -6 | 61 | 16 | 101 | 38 | 141 | 61 |
| -18 | -28 | 22 | -6 | 62 | 17 | 102 | 39 | 142 | 61 |
| -17 | -27 | 23 | -5* | 63 | 17 | 103 | 39 | 143 | 62 |
| -16 | -27 | 24 | -4 | 64 | 18 | 104 | 40* | 144 | 62 |
| -15 | -26 | 25 | -4 | 65 | 18 | 105 | 41 | 145 | 63 |
| -14 | -26 | 26 | -3 | 66 | 19 | 106 | 41 | 146 | 63 |
| -13 | -25* | 27 | -3 | 67 | 19 | 107 | 42 | 147 | 64 |
| -12 | -24 | 28 | -2 | 68 | 20* | 108 | 42 | 148 | 64 |
| -11 | -24 | 29 | -2 | 69 | 21 | 109 | 43 | 149 | 65* |
| -10 | -23 | 30 | -1 | 70 | 21 | 110 | 43 | 150 | 66 |

*These are exact conversions

Examples: 25 °F is -4 °C (minus four degrees Celsius)
78 °F is 26 °C; 107 °F is 42 °C

Update: appliance labeling

When President Ford signed the Energy Policy & Conservation Act last December, energy efficiency labeling became mandatory for all major appliances. Replacing the voluntary appliance labeling program that was being conducted by **Department of Commerce (DOC)** [CONSUMER NEWS: April 15, 1975], the new law requires all covered appliances to carry specified efficiency labels—some by the beginning of next year.

Under the new energy law, 3 agencies have been given authority for developing the new labels:

1. **Federal Energy Administration (FEA)** is in charge of implementing the law & will work with the other agencies to get the information needed to design the labels.

2. **Federal Trade Commission (FTC)** has the authority to actually create the labels & to specify what information is to be used & how.

3. **National Bureau of Standards (NBS)** is charged with developing test procedures that FEA can adopt for use by industry to arrive at the information required on the label.

Currently, the agencies are involved in the first phase of their assignment—developing test procedures. Under the law, these procedures must be proposed by June for the following products: refrigerators, refrigerator-freezers, freezers, dishwashers, clothes dryers, water heaters & room air conditioners. Then, by September, test procedures must be developed for heating equipment (not including furnaces), television sets & kitchen ranges, & by June 1977, test methods must be proposed for clothes washers, humidifiers, dehumidifiers, central airconditioning & furnaces.

To develop these test procedures, NBS has begun by trying to determine the national average use of the products involved. Under the law, all energy efficiency labels must give the consumer the “representative annual average use cycle” or the estimated annual operating cost of the product as well as one other measure of energy consumption (for example, wattage). But to get this information, NBS must first find out how many hours people use products on the average & the amount of energy these products consume. Therefore, NBS is using several methods to obtain this data, including special experiments on how consumers use certain products. In one instance, NBS is using a specially built house called a “Human Factors Laboratory” to find out how people cook on ranges. The agency has asked volunteers to prepare a 7-day menu on test ranges (NBS will test 6 gas & 6 electric ranges) that are hooked up to computers so that NBS can determine how much energy was used. From this test, NBS will be able to get the average “use cycle per year” & will use this information in its laboratories to design test procedures for ranges.

Once the test procedures are developed, NBS will give them to FEA, which can use them, modify them or elect to use some other procedure. However, the law sets June 30 as the date when FEA must publish the proposed test procedures for the first group of products. Then, after a comment period for industry & consumers, FEA must finalize the test methods 90 days later.

While FEA works on implementing test procedures, FTC is charged under the law with publishing a proposed labeling rule 30 days after the proposed test procedures are published. FTC then has 45 to 60 days to finalize the label after a final test procedure has been published. Once all these deadlines are met & the labeling rules are set, manufacturers must begin to use the new energy efficiency labels on appliances within 3 months or get an extension from FTC if they cannot meet that date.

Land sales

After being involved in court cases against them, 2 interstate land sales developers have agreed to set up special funds to either give consumers their money back or to provide the maintenance & improvements on the property that were promised but never delivered.

According to **Housing & Urban Development Dept. (HUD)**, the **National Development Co. of Dallas, TX**, has been ordered by a **U.S. District Court** to set up an escrow account to repay buyers of lots in Lake Chaparral, Linn County, KS, who may want their money back. Escrow fund will total about \$35,000. The court order also stops the developer from selling any more lots until the project is legally registered with HUD. HUD suspended registration over 6 months ago but, according to the agency, the company has been selling the lots during this suspension, which is illegal. In addition, HUD has charged the company with not making improvements that were promised—including paved roads & running water. Under the order, the company will send letters to consumers who bought lots in Lake Chaparral since April 25, 1975, offering to return their money.

In a related matter, **Belgrade Lake Development Co., of Rome, ME**, pleaded guilty in **U.S. District Court** to not disclosing fully all the important facts about its developments—**Belgrade Lakes Colony, Belgrade Lakes Colony West, Belgrade Lakes Colony North & Long Lake Acres**. Company agreed to set up a \$40,000 trust fund to be used by the property owners association for maintenance & improvements. Belgrade Lakes has been selling lots since 1970, principally to consumers in Massachusetts. Amenities promised to buyers included ski slopes, a marina, swimming pools, 2 beaches, tennis courts, a lodge & a 2-lane gravel road.

Correction

In the March 1 issue, **CONSUMER NEWS** erroneously reported that **Housing & Urban Development Dept.'s (HUD) Federal Housing Administration (FHA)** had withdrawn certification of **Advance Mortgage Corp., Detroit, MI**, to grant FHA mortgages. In actuality, HUD had only withdrawn mortgagee approval for the Los Angeles office for one month effective January 1, 1976 until the office could take the required steps to comply with FHA regulations. The suspension for the L.A. office has now been lifted. However, the corporation is still under probation until June so that HUD can insure it is complying with HUD regulations.

Aid for deaf

Amtrak (National Railway Passenger Corp.) has installed a new reservation system that enables deaf persons to communicate with Amtrak's Bensalem (a town near Philadelphia) Central Reservations Office—as long as the deaf persons have compatible teletypewriters in their homes. In Bensalem, the teletypewriter is connected to 2 special telephone lines. When the telephone rings at Bensalem, a reservation clerk picks up the telephone & immediately puts it into a cradle that turns on a computer. Then a message of greeting from Amtrak is automatically typed, & the deaf person proceeds to ask for the reservation information he needs. It is through this written system that information is exchanged.

It is estimated that about 12,000 deaf persons own their own teletypewriters. In addition to calling places like Amtrak, they can get in touch with other deaf persons. Some organizations—such as police stations—will make their teletype equipment available to any deaf person. According to June Asman, President of the United Pennsylvania Telecommunications for the Deaf, the teletypewriters cost less than \$100.

For more information on deaf organizations, teletypewriters & other services, consumers may wish to write to Mrs. Asman at 531 Selma St., Philadelphia, PA 19116.

Project conserve

Federal Energy Administration (FEA) has launched the first phase of an experimental program designed to help consumers save on their home heating & cooling bills. Called Project Conserve, the program uses a computerized questionnaire system to analyze a home's energy use & to develop recommendations that could save consumers on their home energy consumption. According to FEA, homeowners who follow the recommendations of Project Conserve could expect to save between 15% & 30% of the energy they now use in their homes.

Beginning this month, the program will concentrate on single-family homeowners living in Massachusetts & New Mexico—the 2 states that were awarded contracts to carry out the first phase of the program. Under this initial phase, homeowners in the 2 states will be asked to complete a questionnaire containing 29 questions. In return, they will receive a free analysis of their home's energy use & thermal characteristics & specific recommendations for relatively inexpensive improvements—such as adding insulation or storm doors—that could help save money & energy. Participating consumers will also receive a range of cost estimates for either having the work done by a contractor or doing it themselves.

If successful, FEA intends to extend the program—or modifications of it—to other states later this year. Under the first phase, Massachusetts will receive \$231,000 to assess 924,000 single-family houses. New Mexico will get \$56,000 to determine the energy consumption of its 226,000 single-family homeowners.

New Zip codes

Since the 1974 edition of the Zip Code Directory, there have been an estimated 60,000 changes in zip codes, so Postal Service (PS) is allowing consumers holding any previous edition a free exchange for a new 1975-76 directory. To get your new edition, call your local post office to find out exactly what postal station is handling the exchanges in your area.

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